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SUBJECT: Sweden on Olympic Baseball

¶1. Summary. Embassy Stockholm spoke with Gunilla Lindberg, one of Sweden's three International Olympic Committee (IOC) members, to seek support for the return of baseball and softball to the Olympic Games. Lindberg asserted the independence of IOC members from governmental pressure (U.S. or Swedish) and said her decision would be based on technical factors such as worldwide participation and viewing audiences. However, she also noted her personal support for developing baseball and softball in Sweden. Post has also established contact with the Swedish Baseball and Softball Federation for purposes of advocating the sports in Sweden. End Summary.

¶2. On May 25, 2009, Embassy Stockholm spoke with Gunilla Lindberg to express the USG's support for baseball and softball's respective candidacies as Olympic sports. Lindberg said that her decision would be based on the technical merits of the individual sports and not by public support in Sweden or personal meetings with prominent athletes. She indicated that the Swedish government plays no role in IOC deliberations and applies no pressure to Swedish IOC Members. Similar lobbying efforts by foreign embassies would be disregarded by the IOC Members and were discouraged. (The Government of Sweden has taken no official position regarding baseball or softball in the 2016 Summer Games.) In addition to being a Member of the IOC since 1996, Lindberg sits on the influential IOC Programme Commission and is the Secretary General of the Swedish Olympic Committee.

¶3. Lindberg explained that baseball, softball and five other candidate sports were just reviewed by the IOC Programme Commission and a technical report regarding popularity, competitiveness and media coverage, among other factors, was delivered to the IOC Executive Committee. As part of that review process, the Programme Commission heard presentations from all of the athletic federations that sponsor each of the candidate sports, including the International Baseball Federation (IBAF). Lindberg could not discuss the results of the current Programme Commission assessment, but indicated that it would likely be available in August to the public.

¶4. Lindberg noted that the IOC Executive Committee would review the Programme Commission's assessment and listen to additional presentations by the sponsoring federations at the June 15-16 meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. At that meeting, or in a subsequent meeting August 16-23 in Berlin, the IOC Executive Committee will decide whether or not to recommend two or three events for inclusion in the 2016 Summer Games. Lindberg indicated that the Executive Committee's recommendations would be very influential when the IOC Members vote in the Copenhagen IOC Session October 1-2. Lindberg noted that that voting rules have been changed since the 2005 IOC vote that ousted baseball and softball. This time, candidate events will need a simple majority of votes, rather than a super-majority (two thirds), to get into the Games.

¶5. Lindberg was quick to note that as a member of the Swedish Olympic Committee, she is a strong supporter of the Swedish Baseball and Softball Federation. She is planning to attend at least two games and the opening reception of the Baseball World Cup hosted by Sweden September 9-12. She encouraged the Embassy to support baseball's general development in Sweden. When extended an invitation to Embassy Stockholm's Independence Day Celebration, Lindberg was gracious and indicated that she would certainly try to attend if not travelling.

¶6. The Embassy also spoke with Kristian Paelviae, General Secretary for the Swedish Baseball and Softball Federation (SBSF), who felt

that the more lenient IOC voting rules would help baseball and softball's candidacies. He reaffirmed that the Swedish IOC members are completely independent from the Swedish Ministry of Sports and other direct lobbying. Nevertheless, he said that strong attendance at the World Cup would be an important public show of support to European IOC members. He indicated that Lindberg is seen as aligning herself with IOC President Jacques Rogge in her voting decisions. He suggested that another Swedish IOC Member, Dr. Arne Ljungqvist, was heavily focused on doping issues because of his affiliation with the World Anti-Doping Association (WADA). He had no insight into Pernilla Wiberg, the third voting Swedish IOC Member.

17. Paelviae also highlighted the importance of the Baseball World Cup, sponsored by the IBAF and hosted by the SBSF, in encouraging the continued growth of baseball in Sweden. The first baseball game was played in Sweden in 1904 and a core group of 900-1000 players participate in tournaments every year. Paelviae noted that baseball in Sweden was increasingly popular among immigrant youth and girls. One team playing in a suburb of Stockholm is almost entirely comprised of immigrant background youth. Although he has seen an upswing in interest, Paelviae indicated that two factors hold Swedish baseball back: the travel time required for teams to participate in tournaments; and the lack of quality equipment available in leading Swedish sporting goods stores. He felt well supported by the IBAF, Little League and Pitch In for Baseball.

18. Comment: Post is exploring ways to support the September 9-12 Baseball World Cup event (although the United States is not a participating team) as part of our efforts to gain Swedish IOC members' support for baseball and softball. Post engagement in baseball in Sweden may also advance our Muslim/immigrant outreach effort. End Comment.

SILVERMAN